

**THE PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE ON
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH RISKS AND SAFETY
RISKS TO CHILDREN**

ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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The first meeting of President Bush's Task Force on Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks to Children, in October 2001, presented an opportunity to set priorities and direction for the Task Force under the new administration. Priorities were set in many areas, including asthma, lead, unintentional injuries, and healthy school environments. Since 2001, the Task Force has successfully undertaken the following activities:

- Updated the Children's Environmental Health and Safety Inventory of Research
- Planned the National Asthma Education Program conference
- Worked with state environment and health departments to implement a national asthma action agenda
- Promoted the proper use of bicycle helmets, seat belts and child-safe car seats
- Completed the first study of lead paint hazards, pesticides and allergens (asthma-triggers) in childcare centers
- Initiated Operation Lead Elimination Action Program (LEAP), a partnership with the private sector and HUD
- Provided testimony before the Senate (from CDC, HUD, EPA, CMS and DoJ) on childhood lead poisoning prevention highlighting recent accomplishments
- Initiated the Childhood Cancer Research Network
- Completed the Inventory of Federal School Environmental Health Activities
- Initiated a "No Child Left Behind Study of Unhealthy School Buildings"
- Initiated the National Children's Study
- Coordinated Children's Health Month Activities

The President's Task Force on Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks to Children was established in April 1997 by Executive Order 13045, and is co-chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. The E.O. directed each Federal Agency to make it a high priority to identify, assess, and address children's environmental health and safety risks. The Task Force is composed of sixteen departments and White House offices (list attached.)

The Task Force was charged with recommending strategies for protecting children's environmental health and safety. President Bush signed Executive Order 13229 in October 2001, extending the work of the Task Force for an additional eighteen months beyond the original charter.

The Task Force initially identified four priority areas for immediate attention: asthma, unintentional injuries, developmental disorders (including lead poisoning), and cancer. Since then the Task Force has added environmental health in schools, the National Children's Study, and Children's Health Month to its interagency activities.

The Executive Order provided an opportunity for Federal Departments and Agencies to work together to improve the environmental health and safety of America's children. The work of the Task Force has highlighted the Administration's strong commitment to protecting children from environmental health and safety risks and has raised public awareness of the issues. It also supports the President's theme- "No Child Left Behind."

A detailed summary of the specific accomplishments of the Task Force and its members follows.

Children's Environmental Health and Safety Inventory of Research (CHEHSIR)

The Children's Environmental Health and Safety Inventory of Research (CHEHSIR) was created in response to the Executive Order and is one of the first activities undertaken by the Task Force. CHEHSIR is a database of all research and information funded by the Federal Government related to adverse environmental health or safety risks affecting children. CHEHSIR helps insure that information about children's environmental health is available to researchers during the planning stages of a project. This allows future research to build on information that is currently available. The information is available to the public, scientific, and academic communities as well as federal agencies. The database is located at <http://oaspub.epa.gov/chehsir/chehsir.page>

Asthma

Asthma is the most common chronic disorder among American children. It affects more than 3 million children (6.1% of all children) under the age of 18, and disproportionately strikes poor and minority children (NHLBI, March 2002). Asthma is one of the leading causes of school absenteeism— 14 million school days are missed each year. In 1998, the cost of asthma to the US economy was \$11.3 billion (NHLBI Data Fact Sheet).

- In 1999, the Task Force developed ***Asthma and the Environment- A Strategy to Protect Children*** to develop a further understanding of how environmental factors relate to the onset of asthma and triggers of asthma attacks. It made four recommendations for action:
 1. Strengthen and accelerate focused research into the environmental factors that cause or worsen childhood asthma
 2. Implement public health programs that improve use of scientific knowledge to prevent and reduce the severity of asthma symptoms by reducing environmental exposures.
 3. Establish a coordinated nationwide asthma surveillance system for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating health outcome and risk factor data at the state, regional and local levels.
 4. Identify the reasons for and eliminate the disproportionate burden of asthma among different racial and ethnic groups and those living in poverty
- Through websites, publications, and presentations, members of the Task Force are reaching out to health care providers, school officials, and parents to encourage them to take steps to reduce children's exposures to environmental triggers.

- It is also making data on asthma more readily available and working with state and local health departments to use the data more effectively.
- The National Asthma Education Program Conference will take place in June 2003.
- The Task Force is supporting efforts of the Environmental Council of States (ECOS) and the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) to work with state health and environmental agencies to develop and implement a national asthma action agenda to reduce environmental triggers of childhood asthma. Forty-one states have participated in the process.
- In 2002, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) announced federal funding in the form of grants for state environment and health departments to enhance or develop tracking of chronic diseases including asthma.

Unintentional Injuries

Injuries are the leading cause of death and hospitalization among children and teens in the United States. Nearly 20,000 (34%) of the 57,000 deaths in this age group are caused by injuries. The most serious of the nonfatal injuries is traumatic brain injury.

To address unintentional injuries, the Task Force is:

- Partnering with the National Transportation Safety Board on a national program that focuses on the correct use of bicycle helmets, seat belts, and child-safe car seats.
- Through the partnership with NTSB, exploring the option of providing car seats through Medicaid or private insurers
- Finalizing a separate report to the Secretaries of DHHS and DOT, and the Chairman, National Transportation Safety Board. A final report is expected in spring 2003 under separate cover.

Developmental Disorders/Lead

Lead can be highly toxic when absorbed into the body, especially for young children. Lead poisoning can cause developmental disorders that impair a child's ability to think, learn and concentrate. In the past 20 years lead has been removed from gasoline, paint, food cans, and other products, thereby significantly decreasing childhood lead poisoning. Although lead poisoning is preventable, it continues to affect the lives hundreds of thousands of children in the United States. Low income and minority children are disproportionately affected by lead poisoning.

- ***Eliminating Childhood Lead Poisoning, A Federal Strategy Targeting Lead Paint Hazards***, was developed in 2000. Its recommendations include 1) Target grants for low income housing and leverage the private sector to control lead paint hazards; 2) improve early intervention by expanded blood screening; 3) Conduct research to improve prevention and promote innovative ways to bring down lead hazard control costs; 4) implement monitoring programs.
- ***Operation Lead Elimination Action Program (LEAP)*** is a concept developed by the Task Force to leverage additional private sector resource for local lead hazard control

activities. Congress appropriated \$6.5 million in FY 02 to HUD for this program. HUD has released a Notice of Funding Availability and a spending plan to the Congress (as required in the Appropriations Act) and is expected to announce the grant recipients for the first round of funding shortly. (www.hud.gov/offices/lead).

- ***Senate Testimony:*** The Task Force was instrumental in coordinating testimony on childhood lead poisoning prevention from several agencies before the United States Senate, Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, Subcommittee on Housing and Transportation. Testimony from HUD, EPA, CDC, CMS, and DoJ was given on June 5, 2002. The work of the Task Force was highlighted in the testimony.
- ***HUD Grants to Eliminate Lead Paint in Low Income Housing:*** HUD awarded \$67 million in grants to 21 states to fund programs to eliminate lead hazards in low-income housing, promote educational programs and conduct research.

Childhood Cancer

The Task Force has initiated a number of successful projects related to childhood cancer:

- In March 2002, the National Cancer Institute sponsored an international workshop on “Gene-Environment Interactions in the Etiology of Childhood Cancer.” The workshop was very well attended—approximately 100 speakers and participants represented multiple agencies and groups including NCI, EPA, CDC, academia, and the public. One of the recommendations that came out of the workshop was to use “collaborative networks and international studies to obtain large case numbers to study cancer subtypes and exploit unique patterns of exposure.”
- The National Cancer Institute is also the lead for the Childhood Cancer Research Network. The proposed network is designed to establish a national cohort of children with cancer to study the etiology of cancers in children. The cohort of children would be available to participate in childhood cancer research projects.

Schools

More than 53 million children and almost 3 million adults spend a significant portion of their days in approximately 112,000 public and private school buildings, many of which are old and inadequately maintained, and which often contain environmental conditions that inhibit learning and pose increased risks to the health of children and staff.

The Task Force has taken on several projects that promote environmental health in schools:

- *The Inventory of Federal School Environmental Health Activities* documents and categorizes federal school environmental health programs. It will be used in the development of an interagency strategy on school environmental health issues and will be

made available on-line when it is completed. The inventory will be updated periodically as new information on relevant programs becomes available.

- The *No Child Left Behind Study of Unhealthy School Buildings Scoping Effort* - Section 5414 of the No Child Left Behind Act (Jan. 2002) requires the Department of Education to conduct a study on the "health and learning impacts of environmentally unhealthy school buildings on students and teachers." DoED, in coordination with EPA, CDC and other Federal agencies, is engaged in a effort to assess relevant past, current, and planned activities across Federal agencies on this topic.

In addition, the Task Force's leadership on this issue has provided impetus for individual Agencies to expand these efforts. These include:

- The *Healthy School Environments Web Portal* (www.epa.gov/schools) provides the public with access to one-stop on-line resources from EPA, other Federal Agencies, states, local governments and non-governmental organizations.
- EPA will finalize new guidance in the next several months to help school administrators, facility planners, architects and engineers design, construct and renovate schools. *Indoor Air Quality Design Tools for Schools* emphasizes the importance of building high performance schools using good indoor air quality goals, principles and techniques.
- The CDC will be awarding grants in 2003 to State and Local Education Agencies for school-based asthma management programs.
- The Department of Energy has developed the *National Best Practices Manual for Building High Performance Schools*, <http://www.eren.doe.gov/energysmartschools/order.html> an online resource for architects and engineers who are responsible for designing or retrofitting schools, and for the project managers who work for the design teams.

The National Children's Study

The National Children's Study is a large, long-term study of environmental influences on children's health and development that grew out of the Task Force. The study will explore a broad range of environmental factors, both helpful and harmful, that influence the health and well-being of children. The Children's Health Act of 2000 authorized the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to conduct the study along with a consortium of federal agencies, including the EPA and the CDC. Pilot and method development studies are underway to prepare to implement the study. Intensive planning for the Study involves all major Federal Departments and over 300 scientists from universities, industry, and organizations across the U.S. To date, four agencies have contributed funds from existing budgets to pay for planning and early pilot work.

Children's Health Month

For the first time ever, the Task Force agencies coordinated federal efforts to highlight the importance of protecting children's health during Children's Health Month in October 2002. Activities included:

- A government-wide tagline and logo for the month, “Discover the Rewards” of protecting children’s health
- A unique October calendar with a “tip” for each day of the month on topics ranging from disease and injury prevention to environmental safety to school health
- The Children’s Health Month Website at www.childrenshealth.gov, directing visitors to a wide range of environmental health and safety topics covered by the federal government
- A Child Health Presidential Proclamation calling “upon families, schools, child health professionals, communities, and governments to help all of our children “discover the rewards of good health and wellness”
- Events throughout the month highlighting government efforts to protect children’s health.

Efforts are currently underway to expand this work for Children’s Health Month in 2003.

Task Force Departments and Agencies

United States Environmental Protection Agency

Department of Health and Human Services

Department of Education

Department of Labor

Department of Justice

Department of Energy

Department of Housing and Urban Development

Department of Agriculture

Department of Transportation

Office of Management and Budget

Council on Environmental Quality

Consumer Product Safety Commission

National Economic Council

Domestic Policy Council

Council of Economic Advisors

Office of Science and Technology Policy

References:

National Children's Study Fact Sheet

Task Force Asthma Strategy

NHANES III, Phase 2, 1991-1994, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI),
http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/prof/lung/asthma/surveil_faq.htm

NHLBI Data Fact Sheet <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/prof/lung/asthma/asthstat.pdf>

www.epa.gov/schools